

Beware the techniques of the Sociopath

Extract from a blog by "Catherine" of North Carolina, June 2006. I think we can recognise some of Iago's strategies, and why he was so convincing.

Dr. Martha Stout, in her book 'The Sociopath Next Door', discusses the techniques of the sociopath - what she refers to as 'the tools of the trade'. The first technique she talks about is charm. Dr. Stout believes it is "a primary characteristic of sociopathy. The intense charm of people who have no conscience, a kind of inexplicable charisma, has been observed and commented on by countless victims, and by researchers who attempt to catalog the diagnostic signs of sociopathy. It is a potent characteristic". Dr. Robert Hare and Dr. Paul Babiak talk about the role of charm during the interview process in their latest book "Snakes in Suits - When Psychopaths Go To Work". According to the book, "one of the most effective skills psychopaths use to get the trust of people is their ability to charm them. Some psychopaths lay the charm on too thick, coming across as glib, superficial, and unconvincing. However, the truly talented ones have raised their ability to charm people to that of an art, priding themselves on their ability to present a fictional self to others that is convincing, taken at face value, and difficult to penetrate". One must always keep in mind that the charm, like manipulation, can be very subtle.

Seduction is another common technique of the sociopath. According to Dr. Stout "people without conscience have an uncanny sense of who will be vulnerable to a sexual overture". But seduction is not limited to sexual relationships; sociopaths can and will seduce family, friends and colleagues with their acting skills. Sociopaths will seduce others for power, money, control and sex.

The pity play is next on the list of sociopathic techniques. It's okay to pity someone who has gone through difficult times, but if you find yourself feeling sorry for someone's sad story, make sure the story is true. The pity play should be a warning sign to all of us.

Projection and gaslighting are also on the list of common sociopathic techniques. Sociopaths refuse to be held accountable for their behavior and often assign their own behavior to their victims. For example, a sociopath could accuse a victim of stealing when it is the sociopath himself that steals. Gaslighting is a common practice

of abusers who attempt to convince their victims they are defective for any reason such as making the victim more emotional, more needy or dependent. For example, if an abusive person says hurtful things and tries to convince you that you are mentally unstable and starts recommending that you get professional help, you might be in the presence of a gaslighter.

According to Dr. Hare and Dr. Babiak, psychopaths are always on the lookout for individuals to scam or swindle. The psychopathic approach includes three phases: the assessment phase, the manipulation phase and the abandonment phase. "Some psychopaths are opportunistic, aggressive predators who will take advantage of almost anyone they meet, while others are more patient, waiting for the perfect, innocent victim to cross their path. In each case, the psychopath is constantly sizing up the potential usefulness of an individual as a source of money, power, sex or influence". The authors go on to say that some psychopaths enjoy a challenge while others prey on people who are vulnerable. This could include people who are lonely or people who need emotional support, elderly people or those who have been recently hurt or victimized. During the assessment phase, the psychopath is able to determine a potential victim's weak points and will use those weak points to seduce.

Once the psychopath has identified a victim, the manipulation phase begins. During the manipulation phase, a psychopath may create a persona or mask, specifically designed to 'work' for his or her target. A psychopath will lie to gain the trust of their victim. A psychopath's lack of empathy and guilt allows them to lie with ease - "they don't see the value of telling the truth unless it will help get them what they want".

In Chapter 4 of the book "Snakes in Suits", Dr. Hare and Dr. Babiak write:

"As interaction with you proceeds, the psychopath carefully assesses your persona. Your persona gives the psychopath a picture of the traits and characteristics you value in yourself. Your persona may also reveal, to an astute observer, insecurities or weaknesses you wish to minimize or hide from view. As an ardent student of human behavior, the psychopath will then gently test the inner strengths and needs that are part of your private self and eventually build a personal relationship with you by communicating (through words and deeds) four important messages".

According to the book the four messages that the psychopath communicates are 1) I

like who you are; 2) I am just like you; 3) Your secrets are safe with me; and 4) I am the perfect friend or lover or partner for you.

Dr. Hare and Dr. Babiak sum up the differences between a real bond between two people who meet each other and have much in common and the psychopathic bond quite well:

"..the persona of the psychopath-the "personality" the person is bonding with--does not really exist. It was built on lies, carefully woven together to entrap you. It is a mask, one of many, custom-made by the psychopath to fit your particular psychological needs and expectations. It does not reflect the true personality--the psychopathic personality--that lies beneath. It is a convenient fabrication. Second, these relationships are not based on informed choice. The psychopath chooses you and then moves in. Outsiders, without the benefit of intimate conversation, may see what is really going on, but we tend to discount these observations, and may spend energy convincing our friends that this person is special. Third, because it is faked, it won't last like genuine relationships. While genuine relationships change over time--love may turn to hate, marriages end in divorce--the initial starting point was based on real data, as it was known at the time. People change over time, and sometimes grow apart. The psychopath, though, will not invest more than minimal energy in maintaining the relationship unless you can offer something really special, which is not usually the case. Hence, when the relationship ends, you may be left wondering what just happened. Fourth, the relationship is one-sided because the psychopath has an ulterior--some would say "evil"--and, at the very least, selfish motive. The victimization goes far beyond trying to take advantage of someone on a date or during a simple business transaction. The victimization is predatory in nature; it often leads to severe financial, physical or emotional harm for the individual. Healthy, real relationships are built on mutual respect and trust; they are based on sharing honest thoughts and feelings. The mistaken belief that the psychopathic bond has any of these characteristics is the reason it is so successful".

Dr. Hare goes on to say that the psychopathic bond can take place very quickly, sometimes within hours. That means it could happen over coffee, drinks, in a business meeting or, as Dr. Hare mentions, on a cross-country airplane trip.

The abandonment phase begins when the psychopath decides that their victim is no

longer useful. They abandon their victim and move on to someone else. In the case of romantic relationships, a psychopath will usually seal a relationship with their next target before abandoning their current victim. Abandonment can happen quickly and can occur without the current victim knowing that the psychopath was looking for someone new. There will be no apologies for the hurt and pain they cause because psychopaths do not appreciate these emotions.

What Dr. Hare and Babiak discuss in their most recent book is chilling and disturbing but the information should not be ignored. I believe it is human nature to want to avoid bad news or discount information that may be difficult to comprehend. Confronting the truth that there are millions of people in this country alone that exhibit the traits of a psychopath or sociopath is extremely hard to believe for most of us. We all want to believe in the goodness of others; we assume that everyone can feel empathy and guilt, compassion and real love. Unfortunately, what you see is not always what you get and appearances can be deceiving. To anyone who is interested in protecting themselves or others against the psychopathic bond, please read "Snakes in Suits - When Psychopaths Go To Work" by Dr Robert Hare Ph.D. and Dr. Paul Babiak, Ph.D. As the book states "The number of people with psychopathic personalities suggests that most of us will come across at least one psychopath during a typical day. However, the ability of clever psychopaths to hide their true nature makes it difficult to tell them from others one might meet on the street".